

PRESS AGENT HAS BECOME A BUSINESS NECESSITY

William A. Brady Says Theatres Rely More on Newspapers Than on Bill Posting for Attracting Attention—Organized Publicity of Enormous Value in Nearly All Branches of Business—Press Agents of First Rank Are Few

By WILLIAM A. BRADY.

WHEN I talked to the New York Press Club last spring on the subject of press agents I was quoted as saying there were not ten of these in New York who could write a column article that would be fit to publish. What I really said was that there were not ten such men in the theatrical offices in New York.

There was a time when the theatrical offices contained all the press agents, but that time has passed, and now there are press agents everywhere, some of them very good ones, and the best of them trained newspaper men. You can't turn around without touching elbows with one or more of the se. They have become so much a necessity that in a general way we may say the man in business who does not have a press agent either shuns the daylight or follows a pursuit not worth pushing; even our weddings nowadays are obnoxious by press agents.

Yet there is an ever growing need for new ones. In my own business I find it hard to get good press agents, although I am trying all the time. Many men enter this line of occupation in the theatre with the idea that it is simple, easy and smooth sailing, calling for no effort. Of course these men fail, but first they do a great deal of damage to their employers, for they are away on the road, where they are left mostly to their own sense of right and wrong.

Sometimes I have so deplored of securing a satisfactory equipment of press agents as to consider establishing one big central press bureau in New York and supplying advices matter for all my attractions from tide headquarters. I may work this out some time, but the details of such a plan cannot be completed in a hurry. Good like effective press work is the most important feature of theatrical management, after that of securing good plays. We have to rely more and more upon the work that is done in the newspapers, in the advertising columns as well as upon the reading pages.

Bill posting is pretty nearly played out. It is not possible for a theatrical

writer and afterward press agents Benno Wolf, who is making a fine reputation as a witty and entertaining after dinner speaker, came into the amusement field from the editorial room. This is true also of George Ade, Percy Heath, Walter Kingsley, J. Clarence Hyde, A. Tosten Worm, Tony Hamblin and a number of others who have met with more than ordinary success.

The earnings of these men are very much larger in their present surroundings than they were before. They are very much in earnest about their work, which accounts for most of their popularity. I can say to newspaper men in general that if they will take up the press agent business in this same spirit they will find plenty of room in it and very good remuneration. I can find places for some of these to step into the shoes of incompetent or lazy or shirkish predecessors.

Organized publicity has become enormously valuable in all or nearly all branches of occupation. This has extended in a surprisingly large number of directions, embracing States, cities, boards of trade, corporations, commercial firms, steamship and railway lines, amusement enterprises, prominent and minor actresses and actors, doctors, lawyers, politicians, social leaders and clergymen, chemists—and finally, two or three years ago it was discovered without a ripple of surprise that a New York police lieutenant of extraordinary activity supported a press agent of his own!

The city of Baltimore some little time back advertised in the New York newspapers for a publicity man, offering an annual salary of \$10,000.

The Standard Oil Company not long ago created the position of official press agent and paid a well known former newspaper writer and editor \$25,000 a year to perform the duties of the place.

Observing this situation a publicity man of experience and repute asked Judge Gary, chairman of the board of directors of the United States Steel Corporation, for an appointment and suggested the selection of a carefully chosen person to take charge of the presswork for the company. He pointed out that

Augustus Thomas was a press agent,

of holding up the hotel bar. I have known men of this class who could not even write a three sheet bill. In time he was compelled to give way to a new press agent, generally recruited from the city room of some newspaper.

There is a story of a member of the old timer class who had been with one manager so long that he believed his place was altogether permanent. At the beginning of a season he presented himself as usual with the inquiry:

"What show do I have this year?" "None," was the startling response. "Why," said the nonplussed agent, "I thought I was engaged for life."

"So you were," said the manager quite calmly, "but you've been dead for the past three years."

The young newspaper men at first found their new task congenial as against working long hours in stuffy offices at meager wages. Perhaps naturally many of them took advantage of the easy conditions and shirked their duty. These either went back to reporting city news or drifted to the congenital gutter.

Employing managers were becoming aware of what they wanted and what they had a right to expect, and they began putting the press agent through the process of evolution. They made him expert progress and send in proofs of what he had accomplished. And nowadays he is as much more efficient in the field where he started as he is in the other calling he has upshifted.

The new publicity man goes about his business sanely and systematically along lines of legitimate news so far as the papers are concerned. He does not send out "dog" stories which nobody would believe if they appeared in print and which would not appear in print nowadays unless the editor who passed them thought he might amuse his readers by poking fun at the product.

A few months ago a hold over press agent from a past status evolved a scheme under which a young woman was exploiting in vaudeville should spring into the limelight by assaulting her publicity man upon a very busy street in the crush hour. The plan worked out satisfactorily up to the point where a great crowd collected, but it did not fool the editors. The only ones who referred to the incident at all eliminated the name of the actress and the theatre in which she was to play.

Which goes to show that the heads of great corporations do not always agree upon lines of policy and that, so far as we may surmise from outward indications, one may be as nearly right as the other.

There are many directions in which publicity experts are finding occupation at present which were not opened



William A. Brady.



The William A. Brady general press department in action.

poster to attract attention when it is surrounded by commercial printing slick up an artistic "stand" of "The Nine Birds" or "The Things That Count" between others announcing Red Label

for the late A. M. Palmer before he gained his present great celebrity as a farce no importance were greatly magnified in print, that the feeling of the country was mostly unfriendly to great trade combinations, that a continuous

their efforts until recently. The cities are discovering that earnest work in this field increases population, brings manufacturing plants and mercantile enterprises and promotes values of all kinds.

In southern California at this writing

there are a dozen or more bodies of "showmen" each striving by methods of its own and perhaps a little jealousy of the others to attract the favorable attention of individuals or families from afar who would make desirable inhabitants. This work is aimed at the Eastern section of the country as well as foreign lands, and it will be far more effective when the different bodies unite under one director.

In other parts of the country west of Pittsburgh the press agent is similarly at work threshing out a task that grows more intricate as the ingenuities devoted to it find new methods and channels of exploitation.

And so the activities of the press agent are boring in more and more until he has become an invaluable instrument where he formerly was perverted to as a mere inconsequential prevaricator to be dismissed as unworthy of serious attention. Where the transportation lines by sea and land previously met the public solely through printed announcements in the advertising columns or painted signs upon the fences, they now employ regularly appointed press agents who supply interesting reading matter for magazine pages and newspaper columns. The same condition applies so widely in our present time that there remains scarcely a direction in which one may look without finding unmistakable signs of the work of a body of men and women for there are many women press agents who have so adjusted their gifts and labors that their sudden cessation would be a tremendous blow to prosperity.

The press agent originated in what is termed by its intimates "the show business." It began by travelling over the country ahead of amusement attractions when the producing manager first realized that he must have personal representation to offset the indifference and inattention of stationary theatre managers. But the press agent of that day was of great service. In fact, for the most part he was a mere bill poster, he spent too much of his time when removed from the observation of his employer in telling stories in the hotel office and doing at least his own share

"We have all been wrong about this New York run business. Every man of us has been dreaming along to the effect that when a play has had a big stay in New York the whole country knows all about it. If this were really true it would not be possible for 'Body Snatcher' or 'Officer 606' or any other great Broadway success to play within 150 miles of New York to a \$150 house. The thing to do is to keep pounding your show in every city and town upon the continent, and do it direct. Send something every week to every dramatic editor and every theatre manager, even to the smallest one night stand. Just

at full blast and there are a dozen such in China.

Woman's education is also looked after with the greatest liberality, outside the high schools all over Japan, which I have noted earlier, there are many institutions that perform great service. The high school curriculum is excellent, the special studies being housekeeping, sewing, music and gymnastics. In almost all cooking holds a high place.

There were three institutions in Tokyo that I visited which interested me greatly. The Japan Women's University of Tokyo not only serves the higher classes of students but takes little girls from the kindergarten age and carries them up through primary school and high school to the university course itself. It has over 1,100 girls and young women of all grades, with 489 high school pupils. The compound is excellent among the students is almost entirely lacking. There are a few like Keio and Waseda that make a little show at baseball, but the overwhelming majority are hard students and play only as part of their exercise. The work goes on under pressure.

It is not only in the great cities that one finds the glowing enthusiasm, Never have I seen a school better equipped with costly appliances and modern tools for every branch of mechanical engineering, electrical engineering, mining and metallurgy than the Port Arthur Technical Institute, which is under governmentegis there, and is said to be generally helped by the South Manchuria Railroad. I doubt that there is a finer, more powerful plant in the empire, few better anywhere in the world. It was great surprise at the scene of the great siege. It was founded four years ago. Students go to it from all parts of Japan and certainly in the beautiful climate and cleanly arrangement they live in the healthiest of surroundings. In China the many industrial schools for Chinese are excellent for men and women in the curriculum at Seoul covering carpentry, cabinet making, weaving, paper making, iron work, soap making, pottery, the imitations of the golden inlaid celadon pieces found in ancient Korean graves being particularly fine. It may be said that Dr. Toyomura, the director, reports the Korean youth as quick to learn. Here as elsewhere the impression was of work

and presence upon the infallibility of this system and to seek a remedy. Finally I produced George Broadhurst's "Bought and Paid For" at the Playhouse, and it registered a sound success. This was the opportunity I had been waiting for. One morning I dropped into my press department and said:

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to see if my theory is correct, we will try it out on "Bought and Paid For." Don't mind the cost. You are authorized to spend \$10,000 on the play between now and next April. Cut loose."

The money was spent and some more. The general press department became a publicity factory in earnest. Enormous press sheets carrying in the inside the criticisms from all the New York papers were sent out and in many instances remained posted for a full year in the lobbies of theatres. Three sheet lithographs mounted on stretchers and varnished were similarly on view in hundreds of lobbies. Some of these fell into the hands of the opposition manager in a small city and he placed it prominently in his house entrance, as an indication that a great New York success had been added to the list of attractions for his theatre and refused to give up the poster. There was a lawsuit before the ranger was straightened out. Calendars, letters, pamphlets, facsimile letters, photographs, cuts, matrices, postcard albums, special newspaper articles, paragraphs, new stories, moving picture slides, memorandum books, diaries and so on poured out continuously and all the time the public was sinking in that the play was something out of the usual.

Further than this was the unexpected effect upon the box office in New York. When the summer season came on and the vacationists began heading toward Broadway great numbers of them visited the Playhouse, keeping the receipts up to a highly profitable point throughout the hot weather term. And finally when the play took to its travels after a solid year in New York its receipts were very large indeed. The whole country certainly knew about it.

This is a considerable part of the press agent's work, but sometimes the public will not respond immediately to a production which the manager knows in his heart is worth sticking to. In such a case where the manager is of the material of which fighters are made, it is up to the press agent to "set hisys". It may not be generally known that one original "Mocha Whitecomb" play of Deacon Thompson's registered a loss of more than \$70,000 before it was shown to a single paying house. "Way Down East" was fought for during a long stretch on the corner and turned upon a career that is more than twenty years in length and still growing. "The Man of the Hour" would have been discarded in its first week by a timid management, but in a lawsuit before the ranger was straightened out. The author's share alone amounted to nearly \$20,000. All these plays were made by the temerity of their managers and the resourcefulness of the press agents.

It is considerably easier to secure newspaper attention for some plays than for others. A big melodrama such as "Life" upon which I am working at present is much more attractive to the press than a domestic piece like "The Things That Count". This is for the reason that "Life" is dealing with massive and startling scenes and sensational processes and these carry a certain news value which is not to be found in a quiet drama at the home circle. There will be two or three of these big soaps in "Life" together with eighty-two speaking characters and a total of 400 persons upon the stage to say nothing of incidents, thrillers, thrilling escapes of estates.

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So here should be plenty of scope for the press agent in the newspaper and the publicist's task.

COST ROLL ITS LIFE

THE village of Strinesville has a new brass band," said a young man who had just come from a short stay in the ultra rural part of Pennsylvania. "The new band played its first piece the other day and I followed along some distance out of the village to do it. That delicate consideration doubtless saved the life of Farmer Stauffer's valuable Jersey cow.

"At the time the band was playing its first tune the bull was following it closely in its pasture, which is near the spot chosen by the band for venturing on its initial burst of sound. While the band was getting its collective lips ready to compel that burst its horns the small boy who had been playing the episode was taking the posture to get to the

"The bull took note of the small boy and proceeded at once to hasten his trip across the lot. The boy did not delay his hastening. The bull had not seen the procession making through the meadow, although the boy was shouting his displeasure louder than he ran and the small boy was trying to raise his voice in audible and penetrative tones, so absorbed was that boy in the thought of what it was on the verge of lifting up its horns.

"The bull was within three jumps of the small boy when the boy had at last got ready to play its part. The band began to play. At the first burst from the assembled horns the bull stopped short, threw up his head and snuffed the air. The band blared as the bull turned and rushed wildly toward a nearby stone wall that divided the lot from an orchard. The boy threw his soul once more into its horns and the bull sprang over the wall. He came down on his head on the other side. The small boy, though not dead in his flight, and the last seen of him was a streak of dust in the road leading to Strinesville. The bull's neck was broken. He was dead."

"These people," said I to myself, "will never be attracted to my play, which is clean sweet and wholesome. The other public has been scared away from the theatre altogether. We might as well pack up the former and start in to get back the latter."

I began out a plan of campaign that was at least comprehensive. I said: "Invite the clergymen, Board of Education head, principals of schools and leaders of all sorts of movements for social betterment. When they see this play they will do the rest. The clean public is the biggest public any-